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19 February 1965

*Added by DCL
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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: National Security Council Meeting at the White House
at 5:00 p.m., on 18 February 1965

NSC REVIEW
COMPLETED,
10/31/03

1. The President, Secretary Rusk, Secretary Ball, and Secretary McNamara entered late, after what appeared to have been a consultation in the President's office. Among others present in the Cabinet Room were Ambassador Thompson, Ambassador Unger, Mr. Bill Bundy of State; Secretary Vance, General Wheeler, and Mr. McNaughton of Defense; Carl Rowan of USIA; Secretary Dillon of Treasury; the Vice President; McGeorge Bundy, Bromley Smith, Chester Cooper, George Reedy, Jack Valenti, and Bill Moyers of the White House Staff. There were a couple of other individuals I did not recognize sitting on the sidelines.

2. The President stated he had called this meeting to review the situation in South Vietnam and that after a few remarks by him, he would ask Secretary McNamara to brief on the military situation and Secretary Rusk to brief on the political situation. The President referred to his speech of yesterday in which, at the end, he spoke about South Vietnam. (These remarks are attached in their entirety.) The speech was made to the National Industrial Conference Board at the Sheraton Park Hotel on 17 February. He repeated the bulk of that speech as to why we are in South Vietnam and stated that the indications were that incidents in South Vietnam were rising, and if they continued to increase, then our response thereto would likewise increase. He did not refer substantively to his prior conversation with General Eisenhower but it was quite apparent to me that he had been much impressed with Eisenhower's views. He did recount that Eisenhower had expressed his deep gratitude on the directive he had received from General Marshall at the time Eisenhower took command in Europe. This was "Proceed to Germany

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and destroy the German armies." Eisenhower said this was the finest directive he had ever received. The President stated that this was the kind of directive he would like to receive and he would like his field commanders to receive from him. The reference was circuitous and its significance escaped me. I thought perhaps the President would lead into a policy decision giving Ambassador Taylor and General Westmoreland much more flexibility and leeway in planning their operations but this did not develop.

3. McNamara stated that infiltration from North Vietnam was twice as high in '64 as it was in '63, that the terror attacks now totaling about 500 a week were increasing, that the fatalities in January had shown the highest level of the war, i.e., 2200 VC and 800 SVN. He stated that during January and the first two weeks of February the United States had had 49 killed in these six weeks compared to 295 total in the preceding four years. At this point the President divided 295 by 4 and then compared 74 average per year against the 49 in six weeks. McNamara stated that in view of this rising tempo, General Khanh had requested permission to make three air strikes in the southern portion of North Vietnam but McNamara had stood him down to await the results of this present meeting. McNamara stated that Ambassador Taylor, General Wheeler, and Ambassador Johnson all wanted more strikes in southern North Vietnam, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff strongly endorsed this position, and that McNamara and Vance did likewise. The President interjected a question, "Strikes in the light of continued terrorism and aggression?" and McNamara replied, "Yes," a response not only to that but also to the continued high military activities and infiltrations in South Vietnam.

4. Secretary Rusk stated that naturally all of us should and are deeply concerned with the situation, particularly the increased activities in South China by the Chinese, and in South Vietnam by the VC. He stated that he concurred in conducting the strikes planned for this weekend. (What these strikes were was not discussed at the meeting -- they had apparently been discussed in the President's office prior to the meeting by McNamara and Rusk.)

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Secretary Rusk said that in the political field, those nations who have a real stake in Southeast Asia, particularly those countries in and bordering Southeast Asia, are all with us and approve of our actions. He stated, furthermore, that most of our usual friends are also with us with the exception of France and Pakistan who were quite restrained. He stated that the question continues to arise as to why the matter should not be referred to the United Nations. Rusk said he had discussed this with Stevenson and they did not think a Security Council debate was the proper forum since this would inevitably put Russia in the position of having no recourse but to defend the Communist actions -- this would then put Russia in the middle and they would be unable to objectively look into the matter with the United States. Rusk said the Department had not yet formed an opinion as to how or when the ICC mechanism might be used, and he would be coming up later with some ideas as to the role they might play. Rusk said that some people think there is a great magic to negotiating and that everything should be negotiated. He pointed out that a formal negotiation that fails has a worse effect than not negotiating at all, and he for one was not prepared to go to the negotiating table until there was clear indication that the Communists were prepared to negotiate in good faith along the lines of our requirements. He said if you negotiate now and fail, then what is the next move? He said he has seen no antenna signals indicating a willingness on the part of the Communists either in South China or Hanoi to negotiate, and we must therefore not be precipitated into negotiations at this time. He said it was of the utmost importance that the new South Vietnamese Government and their troops be totally steadfast in purpose and adamant in their position that the North Vietnamese will not succeed. Rusk stated further that we need public statements pointing out what our objectives are and at this point he, too, repeated the President's views in their broad generality. He referred to the Jorden report which was nearing completion and stated that we must advise our friends in other countries, as well as the public, of just what the facts are and what our policies are. He concluded by recommending approval of the measures proposed by Secretary McNamara (still unspecified, but presumably additional air strikes in the southern part of North Vietnam).

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5. The President said he did not want anyone to get the impression that he would rather fight than talk but he was in agreement with Rusk's views. Furthermore, he said we must not let the South Vietnamese think that we are prepared to negotiate now or until we can improve our position substantially and until Hanoi wants to negotiate. (This was a little fuzzy as to exactly what the President's intent was.) He then read from a guidance message which had been dispatched but appeared to be news to most of the people at the table. ~~It had not been distributed to the community but a copy is now attached.~~ The President stated that he was not going to answer any questions or even discuss about the future -- he said that, in this connection, if he were asked any questions, he would merely say that any and all future actions we might choose to take will be "measured and fitting and adequate."

6. He then circled the table by name, querying each individual as to whether or not they had anything to say or any objections to the course of action. NOT A SINGLE PERSON AT THE TABLE SAID A WORD -- ALL NODDED AGREEMENT. The President then directed McNamara to proceed.

7. It was perfectly apparent to me that the decision had been made in the President's office prior to the smaller group entering the meeting. I said to McGeorge Bundy, "I think this game was rigged," and Mac replied, "Obviously -- but on the right side."



Marshall S. Carter
Lieutenant General, USA
Acting Director

MSC:blp

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You of the NICB have worked with the stock of company depreciation practices, and I believe you know that your work has borne fruit.

I am able to tell you today that your Treasury Department will shortly make public changes in the depreciation procedure which will allow business to receive this year more than 700 million dollars of benefits that would have been lost under the original guideline procedure of the 1962 reform.

The new rules will further encourage business to scrap old equipment and to bring in new. They will further help business to cut costs but to raise efficiency, to hold the line on prices but to keep our expansion growing.

MORE

I should like to end this visit with you with a word on the very serious situation in Viet-Nam, which I know must be on the mind of each of you.

As I have said so many, many times, and other Presidents ahead of me have said, our purpose, our objective there is clear. That purpose and that objective is to join in the defense and protection of freedom of a brave people who are under attack that is controlled and that is directed from outside their country.

We have no ambition there for ourselves. We seek no dominion. We seek no conquest. We seek no wider war. But we must all understand that we will persist in the defense of freedom, and our continuing actions will be those which are justified and those that are made necessary by the continuing aggression of others.

These actions will be measured and fitting and adequate. Our stamina and the stamina of the American people is equal to the task.

Thank you.

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